

Washington, DC — On Monday, April 2 Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) toured Eagleville Hospital, which is dedicated to the treatment, education, and prevention of substance abuse and co-occurring disorders, to highlight his support for creating parity in our health care system with the treatment of mental illness and substance abuse.

“Mental illness, including substance abuse, is one of the leading disabilities in America— an estimated 26.4 percent of Americans aged 18 and older (about one in four adults) suffer from diagnosable mental illness. Yet, our current health care system is not one that effectively promotes recovery from mental illness,” noted Joe. “I applaud Eagleville for the great work they do in treating substance abuse, but we must ensure that health plans offer fair and equal coverage for mental health care.

Originally started as a sanatorium for tuberculosis patients in 1909, Eagleville Hospital later began treating patients who also suffered from chronic alcoholism after discovering that many tuberculosis patients also were addicted to alcohol. By the mid-1960s, the state had taken over the treatment of tuberculosis, and streptomycin and other antibiotics were discovered to effectively treat tuberculosis, so Eagleville agreed to convert the facility into a specialized treatment center for men who suffered from addiction to alcohol.

Today, Eagleville Hospital specializes in the treatment of men and women who suffer from addictions to alcohol and drugs. A 350-bed facility, the hospital serves as a regional resource for the treatment and prevention of alcohol and drug abuse, as well as a national resource for training and research for addiction and related conditions.

Eagleville Hospital’s programs include hospital and non-hospital detoxification, hospital and non-hospital co-occurring disorders, and short, moderate and long-term non-hospital rehabilitation for men and women, as well as a medical specialty unit. The hospital also offers a geriatric psychiatry program for individuals over the age of 65 that suffer from depression, anxiety, and memory loss.

Eagleville Hospital also has six outpatient affiliates located in Southeastern and Eastern Pennsylvania. Each site offers a number of programs, such as a 12 week DUI program, an adult outpatient program, an adolescent outpatient program, and more.

“Today, many Americans are denied access to treatment and services for these diseases. In fact, two-thirds of those with mental illnesses do not receive treatment,” added Joe. “Limiting access to good mental-health and addiction care is not just unfair, it’s unwise.”

To bring equity to the treatment of mental illness and substance abuse, Congressman Sestak recently partnered with Congressman Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) to successfully offer two amendments to H.R. 1538, the Wounded Warrior Assistance Act, which will improve mental health care for our wounded soldiers. The first amendment highlights the fact that mental health care is an essential component to the medical services offered to our Veterans and the members of our Armed Services by clarifying that ‘medical care’ as discussed in H.R. 1538 includes mental health care services. The second amendment, also offered with Congressman Kennedy, requires the Secretary of the Department of Defense to develop a plan to help prevent Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other stress-related psychopathologies (including substance abuse conditions) from developing in our military service members. In addition, it requires the Secretary to submit to Congress within 180 days a plan for establishing a Peer-Reviewed research program within the Defense Health Program’s research and development function to research the prevention of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and how to best strengthen the psychological resiliency of our military service members. Both amendments passed with unanimous support.

“Left untreated, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder can ultimately lead to other problems, including drug and alcohol abuse,” added Joe. “We can no longer afford to look at physical care and mental health care as two separate entities – with physical care as ‘legitimate’ and ‘mental health care’ as something less than that, and my amendments bring a much-needed spotlight on the problem.”

Just last month, Congressman Sestak attended an event hosted by the Military Order of the Purple Heart for the VA Medical Center in Coatesville, PA, and spoke to a doctor there who works with and treats veterans with PTSD. He emphasized to Joe his concerns about the level of resources, attention, and the scope of care available to those who need mental health services. This is why, in addition to these two amendments, Joe also held a recent forum on Mental Health and Substance Abuse Equity in Delaware County with Representative Kennedy, where Representative Kennedy spoke of this and the importance of properly addressing the needs of veterans and service members. Congressman Sestak is also working on additional legislation addressing the funding of PTSD and quality reporting of medical care by DOD and the VA.

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "DeepBlue," the Navy's*

*anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.*

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